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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 NICOSIA 000649

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SE, IO/UNP

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SUBJECT: TALAT STILL TROUBLED BY GREEK CYPRIOT MOTIVATIONS

REF: NICOSIA 628

Classified By: Ambassador Ronald Schlicher, Reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: "I believe Christofias sincerely desires a solution," Turkish Cypriot leader Mehmet Ali Talat informed the Ambassador at his farewell call August 6, "but I doubt his ability to manage the process and control Greek Cypriot hard-liners." Formal negotiations would commence on September 3; in that mostly-ceremonial gathering, Talat continued, the leaders would determine their frequency of meeting, other modalities, and possibly craft a broad agenda for the first phase of talks. Despite Christofias agreeing on July 25 to the start of full-fledged talks -- a bold decision that the G/C hard-liners only grudgingly accepted -- Talat voiced great doubt over Greek Cypriot motivations. "They have no reason to negotiate, really, since they 'have it all' now," he lamented. As proof, Talat claimed Christofias had been intent on abandoning preparatory talks had he not won "concessions" from the T/C side on the unified state's single sovereignty and citizenship. Talat evinced comfort with the state of U.S.-Turkish Cypriot relations, but continued to spew vitriol toward the British, whose "anti-T/C" MOU with the Republic of Cyprus had proven they no longer functioned as honest brokers. Changing subjects at the conclusion of the call, the Turkish Cypriot leader predicted the "TRNC Parliament" would conclude deliberations on key anti-TIP and anti-money laundering "legislation" by October, and hoped rare August rains might stave off a water crisis. END SUMMARY.

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Optimistic, But Not Blindly So  
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12. (C) Talat looked tired and distracted early on, perhaps the product of overseeing "the social event of the year in 'Northern Cyprus,'" as T/C media described the July 31 wedding of his daughter, Aysenur. He hoped to rest and recuperate at an August 11 follow-on ceremony in Tunisia, the groom's home country. In response to congratulations from the Ambassador for success in re-starting the formal negotiation process, Talat voiced optimism and doubt simultaneously. "I believe Christofias and his close advisors sincerely desire a solution to the Cyprus Problem," he ventured. Problems in Greek Cypriot "society," however, meant success was far from assured. Hard-liners in the south, such as Archbishop Chrysostomos, would continue to challenge Christofias's authority and ability to compromise, Talat argued. His own side's most-celebrated hard-liner, former "TRNC President" Rauf Denktash, had warned him that Christofias's recent meeting with the Primate and Chrysostomos's subsequent, public acceptance of the President's Cyprus Problem management was proof that the two Greek Cypriots' positions were converging -- and not for the better. (Comment: Our own interpretation of the Archbishop's newfound support for Christofias is that any

"convergence" of views would likely be on the non-taxation of Church property. End Comment)

13. (C) Significant progress had occurred since Christofias's election, Talat concurred. Formal negotiations under UN auspices would begin with a mostly-ceremonial meeting on September 3, with newly-named UN Special Adviser Alexander Downer present. At the initial gathering, Talat hoped to hammer out modalities for the coming process. His earlier suggestion for twice-weekly leaders' meeting had met with pushback from Christofias, the latter claiming he had "other duties" apart from negotiating which precluded such a heavy schedule. "I demanded that the weekly meeting last a full day, however, and he accepted." Also meriting the leaders' study September 3 were additional modalities, such as the size of the negotiating teams. Last, Talat hoped the two men could iron out a tentative agenda for the first phase of talks. Christofias's expected departure for the UN General Assembly in mid-September would affect the rhythm of negotiations, but Talat hoped to "double-up" meetings either the previous or successive weeks. He had no intention himself to attend the General Assembly, since the "TRNC's" unrecognized status meant high-level meetings were unattainable. (Note: Talat revealed that "TRNC Foreign Minister" Turgay Avci would participate in an on-the-UNGA-margins meeting of Organization of the Islamic Conference FMs. End Note.)

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Doubts Aplenty Over G/C Intentions  
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14. (C) While hoping for success in the current negotiating effort, Talat clearly had not abandoned planning for failure. "A key question for all," he posited, "is what happens if the process falls apart, especially if the Greek Cypriots are to blame?" Talat argued that G/Cs -- prosperous, internationally-recognized, and full EU members -- had no incentive to negotiate in good faith. "Except for Christofias's ideology (his AKEL party favors a federal solution, and for much of its history welcomed T/C membership), there's nothing compelling him to deal." As the negotiators began to tackle prickly issues, such as property and security/guarantees, both sides would be forced to compromise, he explained. Only the Turkish Cypriots had been willing to make concessions so far, however.

15. (C) As proof of the Greek Cypriots' ostensible, borderline-intransigent state, Talat revealed that, at the leaders' July 1 meeting, Christofias had demanded that Talat accept mention in the resulting joint statement of the unified state's single citizenship and sovereignty; had he (Talat) refused, Christofias would have walked out and refused to countenance full-fledged talks, to which the G/C leader had committed in their earlier May 23 meeting. "And when I implored him to consider the implications of such a move, he simply responded 'I don't care,'" Talat grimaced. Sovereignty must emanate equally from the TWO peoples on the island, he continued; any other model signified a unitary, not federal state, unacceptable to Turkish Cypriots.

16. (C) Talat had felt compelled to accept the single sovereignty mention in order to preserve momentum and goodwill between the communities, he insisted. Christofias had not budged an inch, for example refusing the T/C leader's proposal for internal (constituent state) citizenship. The Ambassador responded forcefully to Talat's charges. While the Greek Cypriot leader answered ultimately to his own constituency and would defend his own community's interests, Christofias had shown flexibility and courage in taking on the hard-liners, such as when he admitted that Greek Cypriots deserved some blame for the destruction of the 1960 Republic. Christofias, in stark contrast to his predecessors, also had given his constituency clear public messages that painful

compromises would be required to achieve a settlement. Rather than entering the negotiations suspicious of Christofias's intentions and thereby wary of dealing, Talat ought to instead be forthright in reminding the G/C leader of what he had told his own people with regard to the need for compromise.

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U.S. Good, UK Bad  
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17. (C) In his concluding words, the Ambassador expressed regret at leaving the island at such a promising juncture. A new ambassador would soon arrive, and interest in resolving the Cyprus Problem would remain high in Nicosia and Washington. Talat welcomed the news, thanked the Ambassador for his service, and agreed that ties between the United States and the Turkish Cypriot community remained close. Not so warm were T/Cs' relations with the island's former colonial master. Increasingly, it appeared that Britain did not want a Cyprus solution, Talat bemoaned. Why else had they signed such an inflammatory memorandum of understanding with the "Greek Cypriot government," especially at a crucial moment in the intercommunal talks? Convinced that Britain's desires to improve its bilateral relations with the RoC had led it to sell out Turkish Cypriots, Talat felt that that country could no longer play the role of honest broker. The Ambassador cautioned Talat to reconsider and not needlessly alienate the UK, the Turks' and T/Cs' best friends in Brussels and a guarantor power whose support the T/Cs ought try to cultivate.

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Wrapping up with a Readout  
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18. (C) Prompted by the Ambassador, Talat turned last to actions his "government" and "legislature" soon would undertake. "Parliament," currently on recess, would return in a month and consider two pieces of key "legislation," one regarding trafficking in persons and the other money laundering. He hoped both would pass by October, helping to bring the "TRNC" closer to international crime-fighting norms. Regarding the water crisis currently gripping the island, Talat considered August 15 a crucial date. Historically, wells ran driest in mid-August; if there were no rains before then -- highly unlikely, according to most

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meteorologists -- northern Cyprus would face crisis conditions, he admitted. Officials in Famagusta had reached agreement with an Israeli firm to construct a desalinization plant to meet much of eastern end of the island's needs, but that plant would not come on-line before 2010.

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Comment  
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19. (C) Regrettably, "Woe is me" is never far from even the most pro-solution Turkish Cypriots' lips. While we did not predict unbridled optimism from Talat -- anyone facing the Greek Cypriots, tenacious negotiators, should be brighter than that -- we also did not expect him to harp continually on the G/Cs' lack of incentive to deal. For their part, the Greek Cypriots worry the Turks have no real incentive themselves, and will pressure Talat in ways that abort the possibility of an agreement. Thus, each side desires a "Plan B" that would protect its interests in the event of a collapse in negotiations. In both our public comments and private conversations, however, our line remains the same: the sides should plan for success, not failure. Based on their continued focus on the sovereignty issue, however, which seems germane only if the new state were to fail, they've not yet gotten the message.  
SCHLICHER